

Abstracts 556

TITLE: How Should HIV Educators Respond to Fads and Criticism?

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ISSUE: HIV prevention efforts are often under attack. Criticisms have included that educators rely on the “condom code,” that we are patronizing, that we are responsible for new infections, that we have no psychological understanding of sexuality, that we are a job corps, that we are the sex police, that we are responsible for the creation of barebacking. How true are these criticisms? What lessons can we learn from them and from our reactions to them? This is a 2hour workshop with the following goals:

- 1) *To review the different criticisms that we as HIV educators have heard.* This brainstorm may include criticisms from the popular press, from cultural critics, from “hard scientists,” from those who do not believe in HIV, those inside and outside HIV prevention, and from inside and outside the U.S.
- 2) *To examine the motives for some of these criticisms.* How many of these criticisms are based on self-promotion? Searching for new justifications for risk behavior? Honest assessment of our efforts?
- 3) *To discuss which truths may lie within these criticisms.* Which have we found useful?
- 4) *To discover strategies for responding to them.* How do we keep focused on our jobs while feeling the heat of criticism—particularly when we are afraid that we may be shooting in the dark? How do we maintain flexibility to pilot adapting our programs to incorporate them? How strong are our theoretical and program foundations if criticisms can throw us off balance as easily as they often do?
- 5) *How can we ask critical questions of our work and get constructive criticism from our constituencies?* How can we best offer one another constructive criticism—and get it from our funders and our constituencies? Participants should bring at least one criticism that they have heard to the workshop, how they reacted to it, and what suggestions they would make based on that experience.

RESULTS: At the end of this workshop, we expect that participants will have some tools to judge a) which criticisms we need to respond to and b) how to judge when it is appropriate to have enough confidence to move ahead while listening to criticism.

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